

Spiritual and Moral Principles for Promoting Gender Sensitivity and Equality

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Abstract The necessity of spiritual and moral principles for promoting gender sensitivity and equality is assumed reality despite the lack of empirical information that directly compares women and men. Gender sensitivity is the ability to recognize gender issues and to recognize women's different perceptions and interests arising from their different social position and gender roles. Gender differences on spiritual and moral principles are depending on the personal and educational factors associated with changes in spirituality. The gender differences in spiritual qualities and gendered patterns of spiritual development are associated with religious identity, peer relationships, and gender sensitivity.

Keywords: *Gender sensitivity, Spirituality, Feminism, Gender Equality*

I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of gender difference is a popular concept in modern society that is predicated on everything from media speculation to personal anecdotes to scientific research. Indeed, many who have studied empirically the multiple facets of human development either imply or directly infer that men and women are simply different, whether it be in regard to women's unique forms of moral reasoning (Gilligan 1982), ways of knowing (Magolda 1992), emotionality (Miller 1976), styles of relational attachment. Differences on all of these dimensions, encompassed as they are by the affective, internal aspects of the human psyche, lead to beliefs about gendered experiences with respect to the spiritual self as well.

A. Gender sensitivity

Gender sensitivity can be defined as the ability to recognize gender issues and to recognize women's different perceptions and interests arising from their different social position and gender roles. Gender sensitivity is the act of being aware of the ways people think about gender, so that individuals rely less on assumptions about traditional and outdated views on the roles of men and women. True gender sensitivity, it is said, moves past these terms to include all and exclude none. It is further contended by experts that the use of such terms is by no means innocent, and they have a negative cultural effect felt beyond the words. By making women either absent or non-apparent in terms like "mankind," they become worthless and society will see them as possessing less value. This societal view in extreme forms is of detriment and corresponds to

discrimination and even, arguably, things like greater violence against women.

At the core of gender sensitivity in language is the goal of stripping away assumptions about limits of gender, and this benefits men and women. A stay at home parent isn't automatically a mom, but can be a dad too. Such sensitivity from a language basis offers more choice and gives people the opportunity to view each other as individuals with different capacities, shedding assumptions about the traditional roles men and women may fill.

Gender Sensitivity Consciousness raising has three functions:

- It provides women with both political insight and moral support in confronting gender issues affecting their lives.
- It reveals to the women who take part, through a reappraisal of their personal experience, their common oppression by men, thereby fostering a new and militant solidarity among them.
- It is a source of collective knowledge about women where they first come to understand the importance of gender issues.

B. Spirituality

Spirituality may be defined as the process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness; transcending one's current locus of centricity developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and community. It may be a deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in life which is openness to exploring a relationship with a higher power or powers that transcend human existence and human knowing. The spiritual dimension can involve religious sensitivities, or, on a more fundamental level, the locus of one's faith and trust but spirituality can be altogether separate from religious belief and practice as well. The distinctions between "spiritual" and "religious" are by no means definitive. There is a high degree of correlation between the constructs and both are associated with internal processes and traits, as well as outward manifestations of those inner qualities.

C. Feminism

A worldwide movement that seeks to raise women's political, economic and social status and fights for gender equality in all aspects of life in all societies. The concepts underlying feminism continue to evolve according to the socioeconomic, political and cultural context in which the movement is taking place. Feminism has four general streams:

- Liberal feminism emphasizes social and legal reforms through policies to create equal opportunities for women, thereby assuming that changes in socialization practices and the reeducation of the public will result in more liberated and egalitarian gender relations.
- Marxist feminism sees capitalism's class relations as the root cause of the oppression, exploitation and discrimination experienced by women.
- Socialist feminism sees the origins of women's oppression in the systems of patriarchy and capitalism. Socialist feminism, especially for women in developing countries, has worked at overcoming gender blindness in the struggle for development and against shared oppression of women due to class, race, religion or citizenship.
- Radical feminism looks at gender as the primary form of oppression and sees class and race as extensions of patriarchal domination.

Feminism is finally a continuous evolution of praxis based on one's concrete conditions and life experiences and feminist's journey from one side of the theoretical spectrum to the other, to make the struggle real and relevant to a particular time and space.

II. IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUALITY

Worldwide, most countries recognize that equal rights should exist between men and women. Many have produced regulations intended to fight discrimination and programs granting women access to health, education, and economic rights such as land ownership. However, the fact remains that women have fewer opportunities than men to benefit from economic development, with lower participation in the labor force.

Even in the most advanced countries, their wages average 73 percent of those of men. International programs such as the Millennium Development Goals point out the benefits of addressing gender inequality and the positive impact this can have on poverty reduction.

III. PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

In Mexico, a Gender Equity Model or "GEM 2003" was developed and tested by 57 firms with around 250,000 employees, and they were certified by the project closing date of December 2005. The model that was developed proved to be a successful tool for promoting gender equity in the private sector. The following were the empirical results that GEM

2003 identified in a qualitative survey administered to firms. The firms reported:

- improved labor environment within the firm (31 percent of the firms)
- better communication between management and workers (23 percent of the firms)
- an increased number of women in managerial positions (9 percent of the firms)
- increased productivity (8 percent of the firms)
- reduction in salary gap (8 percent of the firms)
- reduction in maternity-related discrimination (8 percent of the firms)

Gender equality, also known as sex equality, sexual equality or equality of the genders, refers to the view that men and women should receive equal treatment, and should not be discriminated against based on gender, unless there is a sound biological reason for different treatment. This is the objective of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which seeks to create equality in law and in social situations, such as in democratic activities and securing equal pay for equal work.

A. Convention against Discrimination in Education

Changes to attitudes to equality in education opportunities for boys and girls have also undergone a cultural shift.

1) Anti-discrimination laws

Over time, there have been significant changes in attitudes which have resulted in more legislation.

There have also been legal policies at an international level. For instance, in the European Union, sexual harassment is subject to a directive. The Directive 2002/73/EC - equal treatment of 23 September 2002 amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions states that: "Harassment and sexual harassment within the meaning of this Directive shall be deemed to be discrimination on the grounds of sex and therefore prohibited."

IV. EFFORTS TO FIGHT INEQUALITY

UNICEF describes that gender equality "means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike." The United Nations Population Fund has declared that men and women have a right to equality. "Gender equity" is one of the goals of the United Nations Millennium Project, to end world poverty by 2015; the project claims, "Every single Goal is directly related to women's rights and societies where women are not afforded equal rights as men can never achieve development in a sustainable manner." In 2010, the European Union opened the European Institute for

Gender Equality (EIGE) in Vilnius, Lithuania to promote gender equality and to fight sex discrimination.

Gender equality is part of the national curriculum in Great Britain and many other European countries. Personal, Social and Health Education, religious studies and Language acquisition curricula tend to address gender equality issues as a very serious topic for discussion and analysis of its effect in society. In India there are many government and non-government organizations are working for equality and empowerment of women to root out gender discrimination.

Feminist theology is a movement, generally in Christianity and Judaism, to reconsider the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies of their religion from a feminist perspective.

V. WOMEN AND SPIRITUALITY

The reality of religious gender differences is apparent, but frameworks for understanding this phenomenon are continually questioned and revised. Furthermore, observed religious differences carry over into assumptions about men's and women's spiritual distinctiveness. Because the two dimensions overlap in meaning, the presumed connection between religion and spirituality seems to have shaped the conclusion that women are more spiritual in a way that parallels their greater religiousness. Two factors contribute to this assumption.

Spiritual gender differences are based on research that identified gender differences in religious belief and practice affectively focused human development theories, and the rise of feminism and its emphasis on women's spirituality. Hypotheses drawn from studies on gender differences in religiousness provide a number of provocative explanations for apparent differences that range from sociological to psychological to biological rationalizations. Yet, we lack empirical information on whether women and men really do differ spiritually and, if differences exist, what in fact accounts for them.

VI. CONCLUSION

The differences between women and men observed across numerous spiritual dimensions illuminate that various personal and social forces play a significant role in the spiritual lives of human beings. Conscientization is the process where individuals analyze gender issues and realize that its causes are gender inequality and discrimination against women in society. This realization can motivate them to mobilize for collective action to address the causes. Gender awareness, on the other hand, is a higher level of conscientization where one is able to identify gender issues that are not very evident on the surface or those considered as hidden problems.

According to the Cayman Islands National Assessment of Living Conditions conducted in 2006/07 that the principle of gender equity and sensitivity in the workplace is generally accepted, discriminatory practices persist in many organizations despite regulations to the contrary. It is important to create an open and friendly atmosphere to address gender discrimination issues. Therefore it is critical to involve men and women rather than only women. Because gender biases are

embedded in culture, it is very difficult to eliminate them without having a holistic view and involving men as a part of the solution.

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